

Thoughts from DOCE – NIFA in Indian Country

The newest member of our land-grant family, the 1994 institutions, have made tremendous strides in just two decades, delivering enhanced educational opportunities to Indian Country. Aided by funding through NIFA, these tribal colleges have promoted student achievement, community-based learning, and used applied research to address the needs of reservation citizens, especially those engaged in agricultural production.

NIFA funding provides a great opportunity, not only for the 1994 institutions, but also for their potential partners to form collaborations that address the needs of these communities. The 2014 Farm Bill expanded the types of partners 1994 land-grants can work with to apply for a Tribal College Research Grant. Now NIFA-certified non-land-grant colleges of agriculture, McIntire-Stennis recipients, and the Agricultural Research Service also qualify as grant partners.

The 1994 institutions have much to teach all of us about working in reservation communities. Supporting equity in access to agricultural research and technology for these remote, rural, and under-served communities is at the heart of the land-grant mission. It's a new year, and I hope many of our partners will make a resolution to build stronger collaborations with these, our newest land-grants. If you have suggestions on how we can do this, let DOCE Director Suresh Sureshwaran know your suggestions at sureshwaran@nifa.usda.gov.

FALCON 2015: A Record Turnout in Denver

The First Americans Land-grant Consortium (FALCON) is a nonprofit association of tribal college land-grant (1994 land-grant institutions) administrators, directors, faculty, and staff. Its mission is to provide technical assistance, professional development, and networking opportunities to its members. Each year, FALCON holds a conference that highlights tribal colleges' successes in teaching, extension services, and research that benefit Native American students, communities, governments, and lands.

FALCON's 2015 conference was Nov. 7-9 in Denver, Colo. There were 175 people in attendance, representing 32 of the 34 1994 land-grant institutions, 1862 land-grant institutions, and federal and nonprofit partners. There were also 40 tribal college students in attendance. The conference included student and faculty presentations; training on social media, extension programming, and research methods; and NIFA administrative sessions.

A 1994 collaboration on water-related programs was explored during several sessions, which will hopefully lead to a future national initiative. David Yarlott, president of Little Big Horn College (Crow Agency, Mont.) made the keynote presentation and emphasized the indigenous ecological knowledge that Native Americans have and how that contributes to the value of the land-grant system. NIFA Director Sonny Ramaswamy provided the opening address for the NIFA-focused day of the conference and highlighted the global challenges that face the land-grant system, and how the 1994s can help to address these challenges.

This year's FALCON conference will be held Nov. 5-8 in Albuquerque, N.M.

FALCON Highlights: Student Research Learning

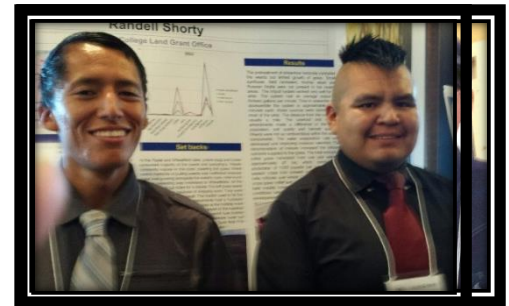
The 2015 FALCON conference featured students who presented research on a wide range of topics, including bison genetics and new crop varieties to help farmers adapt to climate change.

Tada Vargas, with Oglala Lakota College (Kyle, S.D.), presented her research on the Oglala Sioux Tribe's bison herd's genetics. Nine hundred bison were evaluated through mitochondrial and nuclear analysis to determine the presence of cattle genes. This can be important information for herd managers interested in restoring their livestock to pure bison genetics and preserving the native breeds. Her talk raised the interest of other tribal colleges with bison herds. This then led to a discussion on collaborative research among the tribal colleges.



"We are proud of Tada's research," said Alessandra Higa, Tada's faculty mentor and tribal research project director. "We are also proud of her leadership. She's testified before Congress about the importance of a tribal college education."

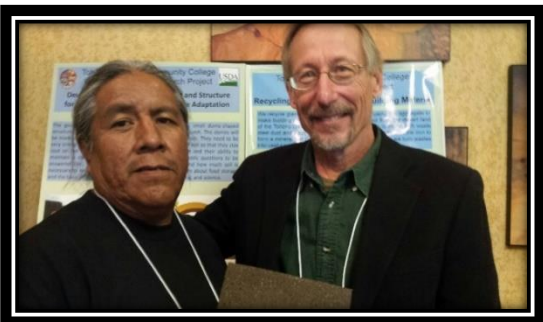
Tiko Tsinnijinnie and Randall Shorty, students at Diné College (Tsaile, Ariz.), gave presentations and displayed posters on new crops varieties for farmers in the Tsaile, Lower Wheatfields, Teec Nos Pos, and Many Farms producer communities in Arizona. The two researchers tested crops that could enhance soil stability and nitrogen levels. They also looked for crops with drought tolerance and cool-season crops that could prolong harvest periods.



"We see the potential for rotating teff and millet with alfalfa to fix nitrogen," explained Shorty. "Because our Arizona weather makes a year-round growing season possible, it's a good idea for growers to try these alternatives, some of which they can sell for food to the community."

"We've been invited to discuss our research at 110 Navajo chapter houses," added Tsinnijinnie. "We feel good about what we are doing for producers in our community."

FALCON Highlights: Faculty Research Activities



Fifteen faculty members presented their NIFA-funded research grants at the 2015 FALCON conference. Environmental chemist David Stone presented his work on storing crops with his newly patented building material, "Ferrock." Stone was finishing his doctorate in environmental chemistry at the University of Arizona when he made his discovery, and is now exploring construction uses for it through a NIFA Tribal College Research Grant at Tohono O'odham Community College. Ferrock uses silica from glass and iron waste from steel production, a product that has never been recycled before, to make a highly durable building material that will help improve food security by keeping seeds and crops dry and cool in desert conditions.

Stone thanked his research assistant, Richard Pablo, who has been instrumental in promoting the project.

(Continued page 3)

(From page 2)

“My job is to educate many of the communities here on the Tohono O’odham Nation,” said Pablo. “More importantly, we need to get communities actively involved with the project to help them build their sustainability for future generations.”

Stone said he appreciated the networking opportunities at FALCON and also planned to visit The National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden, Colo., to get insights on expanding his college’s sustainable energy program.

Erin Riley, research faculty member of Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (Albuquerque, N.M.), gave a special session during NIFA’s portion of the FALCON conference. Riley received a special grant from NIFA’s Tribal College Research Grants Program for a demonstration project on building scientific capacity at 1994 land-grant institutions. Riley engaged the entire audience in a forum where participants shared their vision for research at the 1994 institutions and discussed challenges these schools face in creating successful research projects. This year, she and Co-Project Director Amy Ganguli presented their project, which included trainings for other tribal colleges. They also surveyed this year’s FALCON participants on their attitudes and thoughts about research programming.

DOCE PROGRAM FAST FACTS

The following RFAs are currently open in the Division of Community and Education

Grant	Due Date
AFRI Research and Extension Experiential Learning for Undergraduates	March 24, 2016 (5 p.m., ET)
Professional Development for Secondary School Teachers and Educational Professionals	March 18, 2016 (5 p.m., ET)
AFRI ELI Postdoctoral Fellowships	Feb. 11, 2016 (5 p.m., ET)
AFRI ELI Predoctoral Fellowships	Feb. 11, 2016 (5 p.m., ET)
Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education, and Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom Challenge Grants Program	March 18, 2016 (5 p.m., ET)
Hispanic-Serving Institutions Education Grants Program (HSI)	Feb. 12, 2016 (5 p.m., ET)
Tribal Colleges Research Grants Program (TCRGP)	Feb. 25, 2016 (5 p.m., ET)
Tribal Colleges Extension Program - Special Emphasis (TCEP-SE)	Feb. 29, 2016 (5 p.m., ET)
Capacity Building Grants for Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture Program (NLGCA)	Friday, April 22, 2016 (5 p.m., ET)

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